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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on urban school dropouts and the experiences of superintendents in attempting to lower the dropout rate. The paper is divided into two major sections. Part I examines how a mixture of societal, community, family and other influences increase the chances that an at-risk student will experience little success in school, will have low educational aspirations, and will feel alienated from the worlds of education and work. The section also includes a discussion of some of the efforts made since the early 1960s to reform education. Part II describes policies and practices that superintendents have recently found effective in increasing school holding power. The discussion is organized around the following general points: (1) Schools are working to identify and track the student in danger of dropping out; (2) Districts are creating good school climates that generate optimism and self-esteem among both staff and students; (3) Urban educators are increasingly devoting their educational planning and resources to early intervention in the educational lives of the district's children; (4) As part of improving school climates, urban superintendents are creating ways of maintaining high performance standards, while helping students to meet them; (5) Organizing schools and providing a multiplicity of instructional programs for students with diverse educational needs has become an important strategy for reducing dropout rates; and (6) The task of lowering the dropout rate requires the joint efforts of schools and the community, who have a shared stake in increasing the holding power of the schools. (KH)

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LOWERING THE DROPOUT RATE:

THE EXPERIENCES OF URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS

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This paper was developed by ERIC/CUE in conjunction with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) Urban Superintendents Network at the Department of Education. It represents a review of the literature and of the experiences of the superintendents and their efforts to lower the dropout rate. Many district personnel provided descriptions and reports of their programs: we are grateful to them for their assistance. We also thank Susan Gruskin and Mary Campbell and OERI for their support.

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Part I

The Context of the Urban Dropout

Why Should We Be Concerned About Dropouts Now?

The percentage of American students who receive high school diplomas has remained roughly the same or has increased in the past two decades. It varies from a low of 75 percent to a high of 87 percent, depending on how the ratio is calculated. Black student completion rates, once far lower than that of whites, increased to 79 percent in 1984.[1] Why then are we so troubled about the current dropout rate now?

Over the last several decades, a large proportion of children and youth have begun to live in poverty (see Figure 1), and it is exactly these low income children and youth who are most at risk to drop out. Students currently dropping out of school will likely swell the ranks of the long-term poor, mostly in the nation's largest cities, where as many as 50 percent of the students drop out before graduation. For these youth, many of them minorities, education will not be an avenue for moving from poverty into the

middle class.

A poor, uneducated, and unemployable population in the nation's cities undermines the basis of our democratic society. Cities deprived of a substantial middle class of educated and concerned citizens are as great a threat to our national well-being as the threat of mediocrity recognized by the many who called for educational reform in the early 1980s. Now, just as then, there is a need for a new agenda, for increasing the power of the schools to hold students and award them useful diplomas.

> In Ohio, the eight largest city school systems all have high concentrations of poor children--ranging from a high over over 58 percent in Cleveland to a low of nearly 30 percent in Canton. Nearly half of all ADC children in Ohio are in the eight major districts. These districts also have large percentages of minority children--again, with a high of 74 percent in Cleveland. Nearly two-thirds of Ohio's minority students are located in these eight urban districts.[2]

A high school diploma is increasingly a prerequisite for any kind of sustained employment. Students with no diploma damage their chances for economic and social well-being and reduce society's productivity. Unemployment among dropouts is almost twice that of high school graduates[3] (see Figure 2). Moreover, male dropouts on average earn about 11 percent less and females earn 6 percent less than do youths with high school diplomas. And the General Equivalency Diploma or GED (the diploma most often sought by dropouts who return to complete high school) appears to bring only half the wage return of a regular diploma.[4] However, the advantages of a diploma for both employment and earnings is significantly less for minorities, both male and female, than it is for whites.[5]

Census data project that a working male high school graduate from the class of 1979 could expect to earn $250,000 more over a lifetime than a male school dropout. As citizens and educators we must ask: Can we allow the student in danger of dropping out of school to enter adulthood at the end of the twentieth century without the requisite skills and knowledge that a high school diploma represents?

By the year 2000, a third of the nation's population will be nonwhite, and much of the growth in school enrollment will be from poor minorities, our most dropout-prone population. In fact, the largest population growth is expected to occur among poor Hispanics, who at present have by far the lowest school completion rate.[6] Most troubling, a significant number of these dropouts, particularly Hispanics, leave school before even entering high school. In Texas, for example, nearly half of all Hispanic dropouts had not even completed grade when they discontinued schooling. [7]

Youths who fail to complete high school are more likely to become economic burdens to society. For example, mothers who had their first child as teenagers, and who probably dropped out of school, currently account for over half of those who receive support from Aid to Families with Dependent Children.[8] The public will pay heavily for the high proportion of youths who drop out--in increased taxes to support welfare programs, to fight crime and pay for prisons, and to maintain special educational and retraining programs.

Our information and knowledge-based economy requires skills that these dropouts are not developing and cannot bring to most

emerging jobs. At the same time, fewer jobs exist for the unskilled worker. If the possible workers in a community are largely unskilled, and do not have a positive attitude toward work, new industries will move to communities with better human resources--causing further unemployment, decreased public resources, and a more severe degradation of services in the very cities that must form the bedrock of the nation.

Finally, dropouts present an immediate problem to society because they are adolescents with a great deal of energy but with nowhere to use it. Pregnancy, teen parenthood, alcoholism, drug abuse, vandalism, and gang activity are all part of the world of the high school dropout.

Why Do Students Drop Out of School?

Part II treats many of the school factors that appear to affect a student's decision to drop out of school. However, even before a student reaches the school door, a mixture of unfortunate societal, community, family, and other influences all increase the chances that he or she will experience little success in school, will have low educational aspirations, and will feel alienated from the worlds of education and work--and thus be prone to drop out.

Societal

Poverty, particularly if it is long-term, unemployment, and discrimination all contribute to an environment that encourages dropping out of school. In communities where employment is high

and family incomes are sufficient to raise children in relative security and comfort, schools retain almost all their students. This is true whether the middle class families served by the schools are black, Hispanic, American Indian, or white. Race is not a factor here.

But in households where the adults have limited formal education, are either unemployed, in low-paying jobs, or not steadily employed in desirable ones, youths drop out three times more often than those from the highest end of the socioeconomic scale.[9] Moreover, the length of time that a family has been poor affects the students' school achievement.[10] For these youth, the conditions of poverty--poor nutrition, large family size, inadequate or impermanent housing, the need to care for younger siblings or to take jobs outside the home, and early marriage and parenthood--all contribute to their dropping out and forming a new generation of long-term poor.[11]

> The preponderance of black children, and minority children in general, among those experiencing long-term family poverty and concentrations of poverty in their community suggests that minorities may be experiencing a qualitatively different form of poverty than other poor children experience. Their families are likely to be poor for longer periods of time, and their communities are more likely to have a preponderance of poor people.[12]

> If you're really talking about what would reduce the dropout rate the most, it would be giving the daddies of our kids a job. -- Dr. Manfred Byrnes, Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools.

In addition to poverty, language can be both a barrier and a source of discrimination for many students. Despite a three hundred year history of immigrants, this nation remains ambivalent

about the vast array of peoples who come to our shores, and this ambivalence is reflected in the educational opportunities available to non-English speaking students in many public schools. For middle class non-English-speaking students, the lack of special language instruction may not be an important hindrance to achievement. They are generally highly motivated and can be sufficiently successful in school to interest teachers in helping them informally with their English. For the student who is both poor and non-English-speaking, however, the lack of bilingual and other language programs presents a real obstacle. Often defeated by home and community conditions before they begin, these students appear to be generally unsuccessful academically; and with each year of schooling they only tend to fall further behind until they lose all hope for schooling and drop out.

Finally, racial discrimination must be counted among the influences on students' success potential in school. As the cities have been emptied of the middle class, both black and white, many neighborhoods have been abandoned to poor minorities. Although race relations may have generally improved, interracial and interclass contacts in these neighborhoods are rare. What contacts exist are often tense and tainted by discrimination. Of all groups, low income black males suffer most from this discrimination: as students, they are most prone to school suspensions and expulsions; as adults, they are most susceptible to disease, incarceration, and suicide.

Community

As the church, the family, and other urban institutions have lost their traditional hold, poor inner-city students have increasingly been left to a world where success in mainstream institutions is held in low esteem. In many urban communities today, education is simply not accorded a high value. Long before students who are not academically successful decide to drop out, peers often discourage them from involving themselves in academic work and offer alternate routes to desired material goods and prestige.[13] Students who drop out of school often move in circles where others have dropped out or are getting ready to do so. In fact, a student's decision to drop out is more likely to be influenced by friends than by either family or teachers.[14] The student who is a potential dropout is likely to be particularly vulnerable to antisocial peer pressures. Boredom and low self-esteem place these students at greater risk to use drugs and and join gangs, as well as to leave school.[15]

Family

Many family characteristics associated with poverty are part of the life of the school dropout. Single-parent and working families are not always able to give their children the time and attention they need. Dropouts generally come from families with fewer study aids in the home, less opportunity for nonschool-related learning, and less monitoring of the children's activities.[16] In many Hispanic families from rural villages, whose elders who are illiterate, children's remaining in school beyond

the elementary years threatens family cohesion. Pregnant teenagers, one of the largest groups of school dropouts, are themselves often the daughters of women who dropped out of school when they gave birth as teenagers.[17]

Which Students Are Most Likely to Drop Out?

There is no single type of urban school dropout. A very few students are too intellectually handicapped to complete high school. The far greater number who could continue, but don't, leave for many reasons. Some quit school from boredom, others because school is too difficult, and still others because responsibilities or adventures outside the school lure them. For many, however, disillusionment with schooling and academic failure as early as the third grade provide clues that they will one day drop out.[18]

Students who enter high school overage with academic problems that caused them to be retained in the early grades are extremely likely to drop out. In Chicago, three-quarters of all students two years overage drop out, and three-fifths of all students one year overage do the same.[19] Whether or not they are overage, dropouts also tend to have lower standardized test scores and lower grades and to be truant. They often have lower educational aspirations, and are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, particularly athletics. They are also more likely to have been suspended or expelled.[20]

A study of the Chicago Public Schools shows how poverty, race, school achievement and inequalities in educational opportunity lead

to dropping out:

> ...students who are poor (most frequently Blacks and rarely Whites) are most likely to enter high school with low reading scores, as are Hispanics (most likely, those with Limited English Proficiency). Many of those with low reading scores are likely also to be overage. Those with low reading scores and those overage are most likely to drop out. In Chicago, poor, minority students with low reading scores are primarily directed to inner-city, non-selective neighborhood high schools. Those most dropout-prone students are aggregated together and the best prepared students are aggregated together. Not surprisingly, the dropout rates in these types of schools are significantly different![21]

Students' sense of failure from early poor academic performance, their feeling that teachers don't care, and hopelessness about their future may make them unwilling to remain in school. Although a few years later teenagers may regret having left school, many are so uncomfortable in school that they report feeling better psychologically right after they drop out.[22]

What Are the Proper Roles for Urban Schools?

The reform efforts of the early 1980s alerted the nation to the dangerous loss of economic competitiveness that educational mediocrity could create. This awareness has renewed the national commitment to raise academic standards for **all** students. Urban educators realize that many of their students--those already at risk--will need extra help to meet higher academic standards and remain in school. For the first time since World War II the public schools are being asked to deliver both educational quality and equity--to raise standards and to provide all students with the

opportunity to earn a high school diploma.

For urban schools to do so they must correct the damaging effects of poverty, language barriers, and discrimination which make it difficult for large numbers of urban and minority students to get the most out of schooling.

> We have 115,000 kids coming across the school door each day. We have to recognize the impact on their learning if they are hungry, in poor health, or have emotional bruises from the night before. -- Thomas Payzant, Superintendent of San Diego Public Schools.
>
> When a youngster comes from a home where he's never seen anybody get up and go to work, that youngster is going to be a very difficult one to educate. That youngster is going to provide a tremendous challenge for any school to help him see the need to finish school. -- Deputy Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools, Dr. Melvin Chapman.[23]

Nutritional programs and health services (including immunization programs, diagnostic checkups, pregnancy prevention information, and the services of psychologists and social workers) also need to be part of the daily life of urban schooling. In New York City, where 10,000 public school students live in welfare hotels, the Board of Education has already added a third meal to its food services program. Parental unemployment or underemployment means that schools must also take on other tasks, such as socializing children for schooling, particularly in the early grades.

Decades ago, other urban institutions such as the family, church, and social service agencies met most of the needs of youth, enabling schools to concentrate on their academic mission. Unforunately these other institutions no longer fully support

students. Many urban superintendents rue the loss of support from urban institutions. For example, truancy laws have been neutered in many cities; the police no longer pick up truants on the street and bring them to school. But to intervene in the vicious cycle of failure that begins so early for many urban and minority youth, schools need to join with community institutions and agencies. The role of the school must be broadened, and superintendents must include in their tasks strengthening, and collaborating with, these other institutions.

> The problem is insoluble so long as we address it solely in the educational domain. We can't solve the dropout problem in our isolated communities without some support with the problems of poverty. Twelve percent of Portland's dropouts were caused by pregnancy. I spend most of my time in social policy issues, trying to create a climate where learning can occur. -- Matthew Prophet, Portland Oregon Superintendent of Schools.
>
> I can't solve the dropout problem until I have the people talking to me who are party to the problem. Most of my dropouts are on public assistance, so I need the public assistance program to tell me how they're going to support my efforts. --Alfred Tutela, Superintendent of Cleveland Public Schools.

Schools may sometime also need to assume the legal rights of parents when home support is absent in order to get help from the necessary institutions. But schools also need to involve parents more in their children's schooling. Parents and the community must be partners with educators to increase the holding power of the urban school.

Urban superintendents affirm that school holding power is a measure of school excellence. Good schooling for the potential dropout is good schooling, and a dropout problem is a symptom of an

ill school. However, in order for the goal of a diploma for everyone to be realized, the school, parents, and the community must be partner in a joint venture. This may always have been the case, but it is so now more than ever before.

> The dropout problem belongs to everyone. Even though parents and schools must assume primary responsibility for educating citizens who can make contributions to our society, the problem has become so complex that its solution requires the full energy of the total community. --Thomas Steel, Area District Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools

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Part II

WHAT THE SCHOOLS ARE DOING

Can the schools increase their holding power in the face of many forces they cannot control? With the help of all aspects of the community, and with improved curriculum and instruction and school organization and educational services, urban superintendents believe they can.

Over the last several years, urban school districts around the country have mobilized their own resources, and have created imaginative collaboratives with parents, businesses, local agencies, and community groups in order to bring every resource to bear on the dropout problem. Because many of these programs are so new--most are under a year old--they cannot be offered as definitive solutions. Nevertheless, the dropout problem is

urgent. A generation cannot be lost while evaluations of current pilot programs are conducted and further resources are sought, a generation cannot be lost. The following policies and practices, then, are what urban superintendents are now doing to lower the dropout rate. They are urban schools' "best bets" in keeping students in school.

1. Schools are working to identify and track the student in danger of dropping out.

Calculating the Dropout Rate. Defining a dropout is a basic step to discovering who in any one school drops out, and thus crucial to the development of programs to prevent them from doing so. Most school districts agree that a dropout is

> A pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school

Yet this definition leaves many questions unanswered. How long does a student have to be out of school without reentering the same or another public or private school before being considered a dropout--20 days? 40 days? Should a student who must leave for prison be classified as a dropout? What about a young man who enters the military and pursues schooling there? Should a former student who is working toward a GED be considered a dropout? When should we calculate enrollment--in November of

each year, as most schools do? Or more often? How these and other questions are answered affects the reported dropout rate--and, in fact, has caused much confusion about differences in reported dropout rates among schools around the country.

Urban superintendents are now working together to develop a working definition of a dropout and to share their methods of calculating the dropout rate.

Keeping Records. Computerizing student records has become a first step toward a commitment to holding students in school. It can contribute to dropout prevention in a number of ways:

- While all schools can manually monitor daily attendance, a computerized system allows for individual, group, and school-wide reports.

- Schools can receive computerized information about at risk students, including their prior performance and attendance, and the special programs for which they may be eligible. This information can be more timely and comprehensive than is possible from a manual survey of records, particularly for students who transfer.

- Computerized record-keeping helps track students and makes it easier to hold the staff accountable for student successes and failures. It also allows teachers and administrators to be evaluated by how well

they serve at risk students. The District of Columbia Public Schools took a step in this direction by including a provision in Superintendent Floretta Dukes McKenzie's contract that she lower the dropout rate.

- A student data base is invaluable in tracking students who leave school but are readmitted, either to another school or to a dropout retrieval program.

- This same student data base can be linked with the records of adult education programs and the high school equivalency testing system to save enormous work in following up students.

However, as excellent as technology may become, it will never alleviate the need for staff dilligence, for no computerized tracking system works without a person's deciding what data needs to be in the system, and regularly and using the data. In fact, districts are already complaining that their data are not being used to their potential. Most computerized tracking programs have also increased the amount of data that needs to be put into the system, thus adding to the work loads of teachers, deans, principals, or school clerical staff.

The new computerized student case management systems also raise issues of confidentiality that will have to be answered in the near future. Who is accountable for updating these cases? Who can be allowed to enter the system either to keep up a case

or to look up data? How much of a student's data should be accessible to a principal, another teacher, a prospective employer?

Aware that they will rely increasingly on these computerized case management systems, urban superintendents are beginning to prepare safeguards. For three years, Dade County has had a student data system that uses the student identification numbers to call up all the services the student has received, special programs participated in, attendance records, grades, test scores, etc. The system employs central data entry, and only the school where the student is enrolled can access his or her information.[2]

Tracking and serving the mobile student. High student mobility in many urban districts is generally thought to increase the dropout rate. For example, in the Chicago Public School system, students who remained in one school for their entire high school careers were much less likely to drop out than those who transferred from one Chicago high school to another--and this was just in-city transferring.[3]

Student mobility clearly creates problems of accountability and record-keeping. Urban students are more likely to move around within a district, or from district to district, than suburban or rural students. In Milwaukee, problems in rent and housing cause high inner-city mobility. Students are also likely to leave and return to the inner-city school from elsewhere.[4] In San Francisco, and other major West Coast cities, students from

migrant families may return to the area each year in November, weeks after the school has counted them as dropouts. In New York City, Puerto Rican students often move between their New York and Puerto Rican homes, and many leave the city for extended stays on the island.

The record-keeping problems created by student mobility are just now becoming evident. Students who move often encounter delays in having their transcripts sent to the new school; they may attend unofficially or not be admitted at all. When students move several times within an academic year, they may not even give the schools time to test and place them. Although districts cannot control the academic destiny of students who leave the district and city, computerized student case management systems can speed up the flow of information within a district.

High rates of student mobility also create difficulty for schools in maintaining academic and social cohesion.[5] Many urban district personnel are suggesting a unified curriculum to help the mobile student. The Los Angeles Unified School District operates learning centers in its senior high schools to help those students catch up who arrive late in the semester or who have been out for a long absence.[6] Holding welcome assemblies throughout the year, assigning local "buddies" to new students, and offering Newcomers Clubs can help urban schools increase the social cohesion in schools with highly mobile students.

2. Districts are creating <u>good school climates</u> that generate

optimism and self-esteem among both staff and students.

Effective school organization. Though leadership and support from the Board of Education and the central district administration is essential to a school's success, good schooling takes place inside the school building. Good schools have strong principals and good teachers who believe in their students; these schools maintain high standards for both academic achievement and behavior; they have a discipline policy that is consistent, fair, and predictable; and their students are able to work alone and with each other on their learning tasks. All of these factors lead to raised achievement, decreased truancy and other behavior problems, and a lower dropout rate.[7] And because, once established, schools can hold onto reputations for good school climates that no longer hold true, school districts are also implementing policies which assure that each school's climate is appropriately monitored in a timely fashion.

> When I go around visiting the schools, the kids say to me, Everyone tells us how we're failing here and messing up there. When is someone going to tell us that we can succeed? - Eugene Campbell, Superintendent of Newark Public Schools.

Albuquerque has organized school improvement committees which must develop three-year plans and follow-up evaluations for each school. These committees consist of school staff, parents, and, in the case of high schools, students as well. In Los Angeles, all senior high schools are now required to conduct

regular self-assessment of the various components of effective schooling.[8] Denver has individual dropout plans and school remediation plans in place in every secondary school.[9] Hawai has created state-wide guidelines for school improvement.

Teaching. Urban educators agree that the key to any successful program is good teaching. Skillful teachers who maintain disciplined classes allowing for as much time as possible for learning, and who are caring and supportive toward their students, play a powerful role in keeping students in school. To best do their job, however, teachers must be given the necessary autonomy, encouragement and resources. When teachers feel helpless they pass on this feeling as disparagement of their students.[10]

Teachers must also work in pleasant and safe environments, without being overburdened by either disciplinary or administrative tasks. At the secondary level, they must be helped to go beyond the view of themselves as specialists to see themselves as representing the interests of their students generally. And, whenever possible, those teachers who are not succeeding in the urban classroom should be given training or a nonteaching assignment.

Staff development. Student learning is a primary psychic reward for teachers, but urban teachers often feel frustrated because of the slow academic growth of their students. Too often they do not have the background and skills to understand their students'

specific educational strengths and needs. Most teachers require help in becoming sensitive to the social and psychological problems of at risk students. They need assistance in empowering themselves and their students. All need periodic nourishment as well as help in refining their craft.

A recent report, A Generation too Precious to Waste,[11] points to the need for special training for teachers of at risk students.

> Teachers, counselors, and administrators need inservice training in community relations, dropout prevention, and how to deal with drug/gang problems. This training should take into consideration cultural background and should develop practical skills that will enable educators to better respond to the needs of Hispanic students. Without competent and motivated teachers and school administrators, students and parents will continue to feel unwanted and misunderstood in the schools.[12]

Albuquerque run an Employee Resource and Renewal Center six days a week as well as evenings for both teachers and principals. Many workshops are offered. Teachers and principals receive retooling in such skills as classroom management, lesson planning, teaching techniques, motivation, and learning theory. In addition, principals receive training in clinical supervision to enable them to observe teachers more skillfully and to make their conferences with teachers more meaningful.

School and classroom size. Over the years the ratio of school staff to students has increased greatly, but much of this new personnel are support staff and administrators, who have not

substantially decreased classroom size. It is not uncommon for an urban classroom to have as many as 35 students. Moreover, the size of the urban school has itself increased steadily over the last decades, with only alternate schools and schools-within-a-school providing relief from the large comprehensive secondary school.

The general argument has been that the large classroom or school can both deliver a wider variety of opportunities and be more efficient and cost-effective than the small classroom and school. Yet for many students, particularly those at risk, the large classroom and school are hazardous environments. Large schools and classes tend to make students feel anonymous, unimportant, and disassociated from the activities and goals of the school. By contrast, in a smaller setting, teachers are more able to give personal attention, and students are more motivated, and more likely to participate in activities and take on positions of responsibility.[13] Collegiality and communication among the staff and greater opportunity for involving parents are also increased in the small school. Finally, better discipline, lower rates of vandalism and violence, and lower dropout rates are all part of smaller schools.[14]

Although creativity in teaching strategies can mitigate against class size, and a good teacher may be good regardless of the setting, for many teachers there is a critical number of students beyond which teaching is simply not effective. Not surprisingly, teachers are unambivalent about the effects of classroom size; paying attention to 25 students is always easier

than to 30. Record-keeping, classroom management, and the planning curriculum and materials are all easier in a small class.

Reducing the size of the classroom and school has become central to alternate schooling and other strategies for educating at risk students. As one of its early intervention strategies, for example, the Detroit Public School system is decreasing class size in kindergarten and the first and second grades.[15]

Personal attention. No one underestimates the importance of strong positive relationships between teachers and other adults and students. Yet students who are at risk tend to shy away from adults and to rely more on peer support and influence. Dropouts themselves say that they left school because they did not feel their teachers were interested in them.[16] In the regular school setting, reduced teaching loads and team teaching, which expose students to more adult attention, and special training for teaching at risk students (including sensitivity to the problems of low socioeconomic status students) can improve teacher relationships with the potential dropout. Alternative schooling, which many believe holds the greatest promise for educating at risk students, has from its inception made personal attention a mainstay.

In sixteen New York City high schools, Project SOAR (Student Opportunity, Advancement, and Retention) provides instructional and guidance services in a "family" environment. Classes are limited to twenty students, and SOAR students stay together as a

group through much of the day.[17]

Incoming seventh grade students in Kansas City, MO, who have poor past attendance records are placed in Student Support Groups. They meet once a week with members of the community and school staff to share experiences and support each other. Students whose attendance has improved adopt students just beginning the program to offer encouragement and personal attention.

Cleveland operates a special program in all twelve of its high schools for previously incarcerated students to help reintegrate them into the school. Intervention Assistance teams in each high school provide personal support and resources for returning youth.

3. Urban educators are increasingly devoting their educational planning and resources to <u>early intervention</u> in the educational lives of the districts' children.

Many students enter kindergarten with severe cognitive and social difficulties that immediately put them at risk. As early as the third grade, many also show academic problems that suggest they will be early school leavers.[18] Moreover, a significant number of students, particularly Hispanics, drop out in middle school, long before most high school dropout prevention programs begin. These findings suggest two strategies: 1) monitoring children carefully in the early years, even before formal schooling begins; and 2) instituting early antidotes to failure

and school leaving, such as preschool, kindergarten, and effective schooling techniques, particularly in grades K-3 of the elementary years.

Monitoring. Monitoring the academic and social progress of children carefully in the early grades--and even before formal schooling begins--is currently considered an important dropout prevention strategy. A number of related practices are critical to monitoring students. With the use of new, more sensitive testing devices and technology, children's learning problems and strengths can be identified early, and appropriate instructional strategies developed for the child who learns differently or at a slower pace can be used both to remedy weaknesses and to enhance strengths. If, along with providing this testing and instruction, schools also monitor students' attendance records and classroom behavior, they can provide a safety net for the incipient school leaver.

Minneapolis students take locally-developed criterion-referenced benchmark tests each spring. In addition, a computerized instructional management system provides on-going monitoring of individual progress. Instructional management reports help teachers diagnose problems, regroup students, and select supplementary learning materials. Reports to parents help communicate about each student's strengths and weaknesses.

In Dade County, students in grades 1 through 6 in danger of being retained are placed in a Transitional Skills Class. They receive a high concentration of instruction in their deficient

areas, working with a teacher and an aid. In its first year of operation, 85 percent of the students in the program improved their basic skills.

Denver has implemented an Elementary Dropout Prevention Program in six elementary schools. The program includes early identification of at risk students (based on attendance, classroom and test achievement, classroom behavior, and parent involvement); staff development for teachers in identification of, and sensitivity to, at risk students; and the assignment of paraprofessionals to tutor and counsel students and to work with parents.

Preschool and early childhood programs. Enthusiasm for preschool is high among urban superintendents. First, is the obvious and growing need to provide daycare to children single-parent families and families with two working parents. Second, evaluations of a number of high-quality laboratory and university preschool programs suggest that early intervention can have such long-term effects on poor, minority children as decreasing the need for special education, and lowering the incidence of delinquency, pregnancy and dropping out.[19]

Urban superintendents are now struggling with how best to create preschools in their districts. Questions remain unsolved about how small, high quality programs can be implemented in large systems, as well as what testing, curriculum, and staff training might be needed to develop preschool programming that is not merely a scaled-down version of kindergarten or the first

grade. Nevertheless, most school personnel believe that early childhood programs have an enormous value in remedying early learning deficits and in developing an early disposition to learn.

Many districts have already instituted special preschool and all-day kindergarten programs, some of which have a curriculum integrated with the early years of schooling. The Chicago Public Schools, for example, has implemented a prekindergarten program that currently serves 6,496 children. Newark also has a pre-kindergarten program for "handicapped" children, which is followed by a transition class that eliminates the need for these children to be placed in a classified program.

Buffalo has an early intervention program covering prekindergarten to grade 2 in ten public schools. The program aims to identify students' developmental learning strengths and deficiencies, and to work with their particular learning styles. Parental participation through meetings and school visits is an important component, with the goal of creating positive attitudes toward school and the academic development of the child. Since its inception in 1982-83, performance levels of the children in the program have been systematically and significantly better than those of their peers. Early longitudinal results show continued gains, with more gains for those children who were in the program longer.

A pilot all-day kindergarten program in Newark, New Jersey, for the oldest kindergarten children and those deemed most ready for all-day school, demonstrated that its participants scored

higher on all evaluative tests than did comparable half-day kindergartners. The all-day students also had a higher attendance rate than did the half-day kindergartners.[20]

In Hawaii, targeted kindergarten students undergo five days of assessment in language development, motor development, and audio and visual perception. Teachers are trained to provide specialized services to students identified as having problems. A short-term evaluation shows that targeted students receiving services made greater advances than similar students not receiving them.

4. As part of improving school climates, urban superintendents are creating ways of maintaining high performance standards, at the same time as helping students to meet them.

Attendance Policies. A child who is not present to receive instruction cannot develop the skills or receive the knowledge required for school success. Since one of the best predictors of dropping out is an attendance problem beginning in the elementary years, policies to monitor and control attendance have become central to schools' long- and short-term dropout prevention strategies. However, whatever system of monitoring attendance is used, it must be sensible and responsive to the attendance patterns of the at risk student. The penalties for cutting class cannot be greater than for skipping an entire day. And better systems for readmitting students who have been out of school for an extended period are being developed in many districts.

Cleveland has Management Outreach Teams (MOTs) in each of its comprehensive high schools as well as its magnet/vocational schools. In mid-October, a member of these teams makes a home visit to every student who is officially enrolled but has not reported. These contacts are followed up, and, whether or not the student returns to school, a MOT member becomes the student's partner throughout the school year.

Several school districts suggest that limiting the number of allowed absences can improve attendance, for there is a tendency for students to take the maximum number allowed. The Duval Central School District in Florida recently implemented a policy of a maximum of nine days, which, when students met it, was lowered to seven days.

Electronic home phone calling systems have helped reach out to families of truant and chronically tardy children without great expense to the school. So far, however, these systems seem to be making only modest improvements. In the San Francisco Unified School District, where a home calling system has been operating in three high schools, attendance has improved by 3 percent. San Francisco also has counselors personally call parents after the children are out five days. Other districts are also trying more personal ways of contacting truant students and their parents. The Boston Public Schools is hiring workers to go into the neighborhoods to find youths on the street and return them to school.[21] The Buffalo Board of Education and the Erie County Community Action Organization have developed the Attendance Intervention Model (AIM). AIM teams scout community

sites where young people gather and pick up truants, and either return them to school or bring them to an AIM center where they are interviewed and where their parents are phoned. A plan for improved attendance is then developed for the student.

In Philadelphia, under the Robot Attendance Program, parents of students absent during the day are phoned in the evening and given a recorded message from the principal asking them to call back; in some districts the message is in both English and Spanish.

Incentives are also a popular way to increase school attendance in a number of districts. Until budget cuts discontinued the program, Houston offered tickets to Astro World for every student in those schools whose attendance was high for a month, and individual students with perfect attendance in the school district were given theatre passes.

Finally, it is clear that student attendance cannot be significantly improved without tackling problems in teachers' attendance. Teachers cannot be absent for the maximum allowed number of days if students are to take a cue from them for good school behavior. Some school administrators suggest giving bonuses to teachers for 100 percent attendance.

Student academic performance standards. Establishing and maintaining performance standards can send a message to students that they are expected to achieve academically and to graduate, to parents to support the school's efforts, and to teachers to be clear about the the level of student performance they should help

the student reach. But if academic standards and expectations are to be meaningful, failure to meet them must have consequences. This does not mean punishment or exclusion: the response to a student's poor performance should be academic and social assistance before he or she gets into serious trouble. To introduce standards without providing students with assistance to meet them may, in fact, discriminate against just those who are anyway at risk for academic failure and dropping out.

Following the reform recommendations of the early 1980s, most states across the country have raised performance standards by requiring more academic subjects and a better mastery of their content for graduation. Only a handful of states, however, have appropriated additional monies for counselling and remediation for those who need assistance in reaching these standards. In fact, with the higher number of courses required for graduation, there is little room in a student's course load for making up failure. although raised standards may encourage greater student effort and time on task, thus leading to higher achievement, it may also increase school stratification and failure, resulting in a higher dropout rate.[22]

Urban superintendents agree that they must keep standards high and provide low-achieving students with the academic support necessary to meet them. Providing remediation programs, tutorials, and summer school are all ways to help at risk students meet the higher expectations set by raised performance standards.

Promotion/retention. Retaining students by itself does not increase academic achievement. Although retention can help immature low achievers by giving them time to catch up, it generally does not improve the achievement of at risk students nor ensure significant gains in achievement in either the short- or long-run.[23] For the at risk student, being held back results in stigma, low self-esteem, a lack of interest in extracurricular activities, and waning motivation.[24] If students must be retained, it is probably best to do so early in their education to minimize the stigma.[25]

Many overage students who have failed along the way drop out.[26] Hispanics students, particularly, tend to be delayed in their educational progress, and are thus older than the majority of their grade cohort.[27] A Cincinnati Public Schools analysis of the system's dropout data, for example, found that students with one retention had a 40-50 percent chance of dropping out of school, those with two retentions had a 60-70 percent chance, and those with three retentions rarely graduated.[0] A Chicago Public Schools analysis showed that three-fourths of all students overage by two years drop out, and three-fifths of all one-year overage students do so.[28]

Although most urban districts still have retention programs, many are instituting new policies that render the decision of promotion or retention less decisive. Summer school remediation programs, for example, can obviate the need for retention, and at a significantly lower cost to the school.[29] The Minneapolis Public Schools has established Promotional Gates at grades

K,2,5,7, and 9. At these levels, students must meet performance standards, established through benchmark tests and teacher judgement, to be promoted. Students who are at risk of failure are given support through special educational classes, Chapter 1, and local intervention teachers. Those who are unable to meet the performance standards by the end of the year are retained. Students who are retained are placed in special transition or achievement programs to help them get back on track.

New York City has designed a Promotional Gates Program that serves the needs of fourth and seventh grade students who do not meet mandated standards. A Gates Extension Program serves students who have been retained in the Gates Program and who do not meet promotional standards the second time around. Both programs are based on two principles: 1) keeping a peer group together in remedial classes; and 2) making sure the work is taught differently the second time around.[30]

Some schools have instituted ungraded classrooms as an alternative to grade retention. San Diego is considering a change in its promotion/retention policy that would permit no more than one retention for any student in grades K-8.[31] Instead, students would be given individualized instruction plans. Dr. Alonzo Crim, Superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools regards himself as committed to a "continuous development" system, although a brief trial run of the program had to be abandoned because Atlanta didn't have the technical backup to assist teachers in working with a diversity of students.

Transitional classes at the primary level may prevent later grade retention and the high risk of the more mature, overage student's dropping out. These classes can help students make up work at an earlier level even while proceeding onto the next.

Placement/tracking. The principle of organizing students into tracks according to ability and academic skills, although based on a desire to ease problems in teaching, is inflexible in practice and places many youth at risk. Since 1964, the percentage of high school students nationwide in the general track has increased from 12 percent to 36 percent, and Hispanics have been disproportionately placed in general track courses.[32] Evidence shows that absenteeism, transience, and dropping out of school are more prevalent in the general and vocational tracks than in the academic track, and that the negative attitudes of low-track students toward school which leads to dropping out may be attributable to the track itself.[33]

Eliminating tracking and ability grouping, except in specific subjects, is difficult and controversial. However, some schools are trying personalized action plans. Others are using cooperative learning as a method for teaching a heterogeneously organized classroom; here academically mixed groups of students work together in learning projects to master academic subjects while also learning social and civic skills.

Discipline policies. Student discipline is one of the most serious problems in many schools that have trouble holding

students, and one that concerns the general public. Moreover, dropouts themselves tend to recall student discipline as ineffective and unfair.[34] As a result, many district superintendents as well as local school boards consider formulating a school discipline policy very important to improving the schools and increasing their holding power.

It is clear to any educator that the best discipline policy is a preventive one. Schools that emphasize instructional leadership, classroom order and academic achievement, that have strong, positive values, and that make an explicit effort to be free of violence, vandalism, and disruption tend to have higher student achievement and lower dropout rates.[35] Classroom policies most likely to prevent discipline problems are also most likely to hold students: established rules, dispensed without prejudice, and clearly communicated performance standards.[36] It is also important that students perceive the enforcement of rules as consistent throughout the school and district. In fact, unfair punishment (particularly corporal) appears to result in more delinquency and poor attendance.[37]

In many urban schools, both students and staff need to learn coping and conflict management skills. Teachers are most likely to consider black males as breaking rules of conduct.[38] Although black males must be helped to learn acceptable classroom behavior, their teachers must also learn to respect the behavioral styles of these students and to treat them fairly. A number of school districts have established programs to improve the management skills of teachers and administrators, including

their capacity to deal with conflict and discipline problems. The Pittsburgh Public Schools' Task Force on Discipline has organized a discipline committee in every high school, which the principal chairs.

Alternatives to suspension. When prevention fails, schools institute other discipline strategies, particularly suspending students. However, suspensions create new problems. First, suspensions reduce students' class time, depriving them of instruction and further distancing them from the school, and it often push students out of school altogether. Nationally, 44 percent of all black dropouts, 31 percent of all Hispanic dropouts, and 26 percent of all white dropouts have been suspended or put on probation at least once, as compared with 19, 17, and 11 percent of their respective stay-in-school peers.[39] Second, suspensions tend to be used three times as often with black students as with white students,[40] and black males are especially vulnerable to being suspended.

Many districts are currently offering staff training to help turn around their suspensions. For example, in Denver, an inservice training is conducted for all secondary principals in the use of suspensions.[41]

Some school systems have developed positive alternatives to suspensions at the secondary, middle-school, and even elementary levels. These include holding conferences with the student and his or her parents, establishing "time out" or in-school suspensions and truancy centers; providing intensive counseling,

and developing strategies to involve parents and the community in reducing discipline problems. Without doubt, communication with parents is critical to changing students' behavior and lowering the dropout rate.

The Memphis City Schools has a three- to nine-week Pupil Services Suspension Alternative Program for students in grades 7-12 who have been absent at least ten days or who have extreme behavior problems and who would otherwise be expelled. The students and their parents sign a contract committing themselves to the goals of the program. Under the supervision of the teachers at the Alternative Center, each student does weekly assignments obtained from the home school. Most students completing the program are placed in a new school, where about half are again suspended. Nevertheless, there is a general sense that the students' attitudes and behavior have improved, and that, despite the extra burden the program places on the regular classroom teachers, it should be continued.

The Dallas Independent School District has a new discipline management system for keeping students in school. It includes in-house suspension centers designed to enable students to continue their academic training at their schools while serving suspensions, as well as off-campus School Community Guidance Centers for helping incorrigible students to continue their academic training.

The Portland Public Schools has a successful Positive Alternatives to School Suspension (PASS) Program in which students are helped to develop the skills needed for success in

school through work with teachers, their parents, and members of the community whose available services are matched to students' needs. [42]

The New Orleans Public Schools is currently conducting public hearings on a new, strict discipline policy that includes dress codes, and which the Superintendent believes will hold each student accountable for his or her actions with appropriate consequences for noncompliance.

5. Organizing schools and providing a multiplicity of instructional programs for students with diverse educational needs has become an important strategy for reducing the dropout rate in urban schools.

In most urban school districts, large numbers of students need a variety of specially-designed programming, often used in tandem, to prevent them from giving up on school. Some students require more time to learn a particular subject or help with the transition from one year to the next. Others need remedial classes or help with learning English and their native language. Still others require a great deal of personal attention, intensive guidance, and individualized programming because they have disengaged themselves from school as a result of conflicting commitments to jobs and family responsibilities, trouble with other students or school staff, and/or a lack of motivation to continue what is experienced as unrewarding. Not surprisingly, effective dropout programs tend to employ multiple strategies

within a single program.[43]

Longer school hours, school year, and summer school. As a result of the reform commission recommendations of the early 1980s, and research showing that performance increases with time on task, many urban school districts are lengthening the school day and year. Some school districts, which eliminated summer school because of budget cuts, are reinstating it. In California, the largest statewide increase in high school attrition occurred between 1978 and 1979, a period when summer school offerings were drastically cut.[44]

Although some urban superintendents worry that longer school hours and years can push out students who are already alienated from school, most believe that schooling can be offered in such a way that increasing the time spent will encourage student interest and achievement. Since during the summer students forget some of what they have learned, decreasing their vacation period will likely decrease this loss; they will achieve better and be less likely to drop out. For many students, special summer school remediation programs are a good alternative to retention. They can also be used to increase language skills of limited English proficiency students.[45]

In Atlanta, Project Alert (Atlantans Learning Employment Responsibilities Together) is a summer program for financially and educationally disadvantaged ninth and tenth graders. Project Alert combines teaching academic and vocational skills with a part-time job. Students are paid for the hours they work.

Follow-up of the first group of participants shows that they have improved both academically and in their attitudes toward school.

In a year-around pilot program on four campuses in Houston, students at each grade level showed at least one year's growth on standardized test scores and had better attendance than the district mean. Students received the mandated 175 days of instruction on a schedule alternating between 60 class days and a 20-day break.

Public schools in Minneapolis offer K-12 students both remedial and enrichment classes in summer school. Sessions are six weeks long, five hours a day, four days a week. Special educational staff and classroom teachers are teamed to best meet the needs of disadvantaged students.

Nevertheless, several districts such as Atlanta and San Diego, which have tried the extended school year, have given it up. In Atlanta, parents and students alike found the idea unacceptable--families wanted to take vacations together, and the students simply didn't come.

Transition to high school. The ninth or tenth grade, whenever secondary school begins, appears to be a particular obstacle for at risk students entering high school. Not only are ninth and tenth grade students at a critical stage of adolescence, but the transition from elementary to high school is difficult. The new school is large and impersonal, there are a vast number of new required courses, different teachers each hour, and, often most hurtful, the student suddenly has no seniority. For many who are

failing, the experience is proof that they cannot succeed.

Many students at risk to drop out can be identified within the first semester of the ninth grade. In a sample of New York City students, at least half of those who went on to drop out had entirely unsatisfactory first-term records in the ninth grade; they had excessive absences and failure in all or nearly all their courses. Fewer than ten percent of the dropouts completed the first semester of the ninth grade with averages of 75 percent or higher.[46] Similarly, the Newark Public School System reports a failure rate as high as 25 percent among its ninth grade students.[47] Those most at risk for dropping out at this transition point are the 16-year-olds; that is, students who have been retained at least a year along the way, and who have been "simply waiting for their sixteenth birthday so that they can legitimately leave."[48]

Schools are using a number of strategies to alleviate the difficulties of the ninth grade. Urban school administrators commonly suggest shifting some required subjects to the later years. This would not only decrease the pressures on ninth graders, but would give upperclass members a fuller and more serious course load. Schedules can also be modified, lessening the need for students to move from class to class. New York City has successfully implemented block programming that keeps at risk students together two to three periods a day.[49] Teachers can also be made more sensitive to the problems of ninth graders, and schools can give their best and most experienced teachers the ninth grade assignments, not their newest, as is commonly the

case. Finally, schools can work with parent groups to help students make the transition from being a respected, graduating elementary student to a novice high school student who looks forward to the next three or four years.

Since retention only exacerbates the tendency of at risk students to drop out, a number of programs have been set up as alternatives to retention in the ninth grade. Hartford has a special program, Project Bridge, which allows seventh grade students who should be in the ninth grade to complete three years' work in two years. Pittsburgh has a Special Needs Homeroom for ninth grade repeaters. A number of programs also tackle the alienation of the ninth grade. Newark has an alternative school, Project Opportunity, for ninth graders with one or more failures[50]; New York City maintains Project Connect, a program for at risk ninth graders, in ten middle schools.[51]

Finally, counseling is being provided to assist students in their transition from middle school to high school. In Buffalo, all first year high school students receive counseling and evaluations to help them plan an appropriate course of study, including remedial help if they need it; and the Pittsburgh Public Schools has a two-and-a-half day ninth grade orientation program to smooth the transition from middle to secondary school.

Counseling/Mentoring. Both college-bound students and remedial track students receive significantly more counseling than do average students in a general track. College-bound students get help with understanding and meeting college entrance

requirements, remedial students with planning individualized instructional programs. Also, counseling staff spend a good deal of time in record-keeping. The result is that the great and growing number of students--including many at risk for dropping out--are largely ignored by school counseling. In recent years, many school districts have even cut back on their counseling staff because of reduced funds.[52]

> We should begin to differentiate our staff so that those who have the skills to communicate with students are free during the day to do so, while others who are more at ease with paper work can do that. - Dr. Thomas Payzant, San Diego City School

Prompted by the urgency of the dropout problem, as well as by the apparent importance of personal relationships in holding at risk students, most urban school districts have once again increased their support staffs and diversified the services they offer to include both direct mentoring and counseling and family interventions. A number of districts have placed counselors in elementary schools. They have begun to use teachers as mentors and counselors, and have introduced peer counseling. Community members, including representatives from business and industry, also serve as mentors and counselors. One strategy to ensure attention to at risk students is to pair them with a teacher, counselor, or social worker. Such programs both monitor students more closely and provide the attention and closeness that is not always available in the large classroom. They also provide conflict mediation to both students and staff.

Some programs are reaching out to parents to offer family

counseling. Special educational programs are also being developed in many school districts to focus on the physical and mental health of both staff and students. Cleveland, for example, runs a program on drug and alcohol abuse that includes prevention, intervention, treatment, and aftercare.

Duval County has the SOS Night Counseling Program, which offers parents and children family counseling. The program has been a great success, because it accomodates the schedules of working parents and has brought in families that appeared to be beyond the school's reach.

Several programs in Dallas combine psychological counseling with remedial education for at risk students. In one program, seventh and ninth graders participate in a one-hour-a-day, six-week program where they work on self-concept, communication skills, and coping skills through structured activities. In another, middle school students receive individual and group counseling over a six-week period. The program also provides family counseling and uses community members as tutors, role models, and student advocates.

Schools of choice. To accommodate the diversity of urban students, schools are providing opportunities for them to choose their own elementary or secondary school rather than be assigned to one within their community. At risk students have the opportunity to participate in an open transfer program which allows them to select schools appropriate to their needs or interests, whether or not the program's focus is regular or

alternative. Providing students with schools of choice, it is felt, not only keeps in school those who might otherwise drop out, but strengthens public school holding power for those who might be tempted to leave for private or parochial schools. Both magnet and alternative schools create new options for students.

> I believe that students need to be empowered. By empowered, I don't mean anarchy, but choice. A student who is disaffected, who feels stripped of power and choice, is a student who's going to drop out. When a student can't get his roster changed, or can't find a course she's interested in, that student is going to go outside the school to find power. Yet this choice and empowerment isn't something the schools can't do. - Rita Altman, Curriculum Supervisor, Philadelphia Public Schools.

Magnet schools. One of the well-publicized aspects of magnet schools has been their capacity to help voluntarily desegregate a school district while keeping middle class students (both black and white) from fleeing to nonpublic education. Although most research on magnet schools does not evaluate their power to hold at risk students, there is evidence that magnet schools have higher attendance and lower dropout rates than the district average.[53] In Dallas, the dropout rate in the magnets is three percent compared to 28 percent in the district as a whole.[54] In San Diego, minority students who bus to predominantly white schools are not achieving as well as their peers who remain in minority isolated schools where many magnets are located, and where extensive support programs have been instituted to help students achieve.

But magnets, when they are successful, also cost more to run. In Dallas, the per pupil expenditure in the magnets is about twice that of the other schools. Moreover, the apparent success of magnets in turn lowers the overall achievement levels in the remaining non-magnet schools. Although magnets are not established to be highly selective, they tend to draw more motivated and academically gifted students and to provide opportunities for students with special needs. Magnet school staffs are also generally chosen for particular teaching skills. And magnets tend to be smaller schools, with smaller classrooms, than other schools in the district. Thus the success of the magnet school in reducing the dropout rate should be regarded warily, since it may easily be at the other schools' expense, and its particular qualities may not be transferrable to other schools.

Alternative schools. In many urban school districts, alternative schools have been a primary structure for reducing the dropout rate among at risk students. Their flexibility, small size, the personal attention they offer, and the chance they provide for student decision-making and choice are all assumed to be ways to decrease the alienation of at risk students. Most alternative schools also give teachers and other staff more power and autonomy than do neighborhood schools--and this empowerment is generally thought to be passed on to students. In addition, they provide low student to teacher ratios and extra counseling as well as special curriculum, often linked to a job or career.

Most also offer the opportunity to regain lost credit without retention.

Alternative schools, like magnets, are problemmatic models to imitate. They are expensive to operate and small in size and number, and so can serve only a small proportion of the district's at risk students. Because they tend to serve at risk students, who are often minorities, even when they are schools-within-schools, they run the risk of segregating these students in stigmatized ghettoes. Finally, while the alternative schools probably increase the school's holding power for these very at risk students, they still do not tend to have very high rates of graduation. For many troubled students, however, these alternative schools are a last resort and their only alternative to dropping out.

Duval County has a Competency Development Program designed to provide students who can't adjust to traditional school an opportunity to earn a Certificate of Competency in a specific vocation and then to take the GED examinations. The program combines counseling with individualized instruction.

In Dallas, two off-campus sites serve secondary students unable to function in school in a School-Community Guidance Center. The alternative program offers individualized instruction, counseling, home/school liaison and follow-up services.

In Portland, Oregon, four private alternative schools serve predominantly high school age students who are either on the verge of dropping out or have dropped out. Many have had

juvenile court involvement. Although the students are generally disenchanted with schooling, most perform at or near grade level in the alternative schools.[55]

Since 1982, Milwaukee has run seven alternative schools as part of its Milwaukee School/Community Project. These schools are very small, serving between 25 and 75 students, and are situated in such locations as a church, an Urban League office building, and a low income housing project. The alternative schools combine basic skills, job readiness training, counseling, tutoring, and, sometimes, vocational courses. In each year since the inception of the Milwaukee School/Community Project, student participation and attendance has increased, and more students have either graduated or continued on in an educational program at the end of the year.

Since 1970, the Albuquerque Public School System has operated an alternative school, Freedom High School, that serves about three hundred tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students each year in an ungraded environment. The students, generally aged 16-19, have floundered in regular schools. Students attend the school primarily in the morning, with afternoons left for employment, work experience, and additional instruction. All teachers share counseling tasks. Credit for electives may be earned off campus through employment, volunteer work, special projects, community classes, and so on.[56]

Programs for non-English speaking students. The number of students who have limited proficiency is on the rise, particularly among

Hispanics, where the dropout problem is particularly acute (see Figure 3). Hispanic students drop out of school at a higher rate than any other group, and they do so early, often before the tenth grade. Poverty, high mobility rates, and illiteracy among Hispanic families makes schooling especially problemmatic--often beyond the solution of even the best bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) program.[57] Yet it is through these programs that the schools can provide students with the necessary language proficiency to do academic work.

Maintaining successful bilingual and ESL programs has been difficult. Although some school districts have both elementary and secondary programs, many have only elementary programs, which makes the transition to high school for many Hispanic students, who need sustained language assistance, even more difficult. Moreover, it is hard to sustain quality programs because recruiting qualified bilingual teachers is difficult in most cities. Still, through raising the achievement of non-English speaking students, bilingual and ESL programs can be a relatively effective dropout strategy for this group.[58]

An evaluation of Boston's bilingual program found that the dropout rate of its Hispanic students was the same as non-Hispanic students in traditional classes--that is, it was far better than the higher rates of Hispanic students not enrolled in a bilingual program. The bilingual program incorporates many elements identified as effective in decreasing the dropout rate generally: teacher and parent involvement, small class size, and individualized instruction.[59] In a bilingual education program in

a Philadelphia high school, 39 students who had stayed in the program for all four years showed a higher level of attendance and greater sense of achievement than students not in the program.

Many students need an advocate to intervene in such regular school processes as exams, programming choices, placement, and so on, where they are particularly likely to be uninformed or to fail to make the right decision to help themselves. In Portland, the Hispanic Affairs Counselor visits the city's high schools, meets with both an Integration Specialist (who is responsible for all minority youth) and Hispanic students to ensure that the needs of at risk Hispanic youth are met.

> One of the students who was going to drop out was an incredible young man. He was a senior with a .83 G.P.A. at first quarter, with credits of a sophomore. He was very handsome, highly sophisticated, and extraordinarily groomed. His communication skills were impeccable. And if that wasn't enough, he started talking to me in eloquent Spanish. He told me he also read and wrote Spanish fluently. I told him how none of us could afford to lose him and that I would do anything I could to help him with his future success. We set goals for him with a personal contact from me at least once a week. I also paired him with a mentor who is a Hispanic employment manager with the Federal government. Mr. Pena is also bilingual and will be meeting with the young man on a regular basis. - Hispanic Affairs Counselor, Portland Public Schools

Compensatory education and other remedial programs. Despite the great variety of programs created under Title 1 and Chapter 1, as well as problems in the provision of Title 1 and Chapter 1 services, compensatory education has been shown to moderately

increase achievement.[60] These programs generally allow students to receive instruction in regular classes most of the day, but to be pulled out for special instruction. Although there are some in-class remedial programs--and the Los Angeles Unified School District, for one, believes that these are more successful, especially at the elementary level--most districts agree that pullout programs are easier to institute, since teachers tend to resist heterogeneous groupings. There is no evidence, however, that Chapter 1 decreases the student dropout rate, except perhaps as a secondary effect of raised achievement.

Generally, students in special education, Education of the Mentally Retarded (EMR), and other remedial programs appear to remain in school longer than do general students. The personal attention, reduced class size, and sheltered environments of these programs are apparently nourishing for greatly at risk students. However, although these programs hold students longer, the diploma a student receives simply does not signal the same marketable skills as does a regular diploma.

Vocational education. Vocational education has been commonly viewed as a way of keeping students in school while training them for jobs available to them upon graduation. As a dropout strategy, however, its value is inconclusive, with evidence on both sides of the argument.[61] Vocational educational is also now being criticized because it does not always train students for jobs in an information and service economy, nor does it create transferrable work-related skills.

For many students, however, good vocational education programs can provide the entry-level skills needed to obtain and retain employment, and many good programs offer the paid employment that students need to stay in school. Despite controversy surrounding their usefulness, most urban school districts continue to offer vocational education programs; for the student who is not interested in a full day of academic learning, vocational education programs that are geared to available job openings appear to provide a viable educational alternative.

Milwaukee's new project STAY services high school youth who are parents, or who have records of severe truancy, academic failure, delinquency, or chemical dependency. The program has eleven staff members for eighty-six students and operates in a downtown location. The students spend a year divided among basic skills remediation, job getting/job retention skills, vocational training, and on-the-job employment, after which they are either to return to a regular vocational or comprehensive high school or a GED program, or to continue working on the job.

The Urban Youth "Double F" Program for Chicago dropouts is a forty-week work study course after which participants return to their regular high schools. During the course, they attend vocational classes half the day, receive guidance and counseling, and work the rest of the day.

The one-year ungraded Cincinnati Work Adjustment Program combines remedial, vocational, and academic courses with work experience either in school or in the private sector.

Participants are at risk 14- and 15-year-olds. In operation since 1979, over a seven-year period, the program on an average has increased student attendance by 10 percent and decreased suspensions by 48 percent. Seventy-five percent of the students raised their grade point average by at least one letter. Finally, of those who completed the program during the seven years, 79 percent graduated from high school.[62]

6. The task of lowering the dropout rate requires the joint efforts of schools and the community, who have a shared stake in increasing the holding power of the schools.

Comprehensive Dropout Programs. It is clear to all concerned with lowering the dropout rate that it demands comprehensive social and educational interventions in the lives of at risk students. This is why urban schools are carrying out programs which integrate a variety of social and health services with educational programming. But which services to provide themselves and which to leave to other agencies separate from the schools is a question for all districts. Providing social services requires both financial and human resources, and includes parent involvement, connections to the juvenile justice system and to social service agencies, liaison with youth employment and training programs, and networking with community, civic, and business organizations. Because of tight budgets, schools have tended to draw on external resources for maintaining programs, even when it has meant sharing authority with outside

agencies.[63]

In New York City alone, comprehensive dropout prevention programs are provided in about half of the middle schools and a third of the high schools. These comprehensive programs provide individual, group, and family counseling; referral to health services; a linkage from middle school to high school to help students make the transition; child care services; and special services to children in homeless families.[64]

Many other urban school districts now employ social workers on staff; a number have on-premises health and nutritional services and clinics. Since adolescents are the most underserved by the medical profession, such clinics are particularly important in secondary schools. Many urban school districts also offer alcohol and drug abuse programs.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, in cooperation with the Los Angeles Police Department, has implemented a drug prevention program, DARE, in which police officers go into classrooms and teach elementary students how to say no to drugs.

San Francisco has developed links between students and community social services as part of its dropout prevention program. A directory is being prepared that covers support services available from the business community and city agencies. San Francisco is also developing an interagency case management system to serve families of at risk students with multiple needs.

Pregnancy and parenting programs. Most urban school administrators have determined that schools must take a role in

pregnancy prevention and in the education of the pregnant girl and the parenting mother and father, although until recently all these have been the domains of the home and the community. Given the connection between pregnancy, parenting, and dropping out, these educational programs are an important aspect of most districts' dropout prevention strategies.

Most urban districts address pregnancy prevention in classes on human growth and development, beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school. A number of districts have also instituted school clinics which, in addition to offering general health care, may provide contraceptive advice and referrals, although most avoid dispensing contraception. Because of their controversial nature, many school clinics require parental permission for student participation. Moreover, districts often allow city health departments or other agencies to run the clinics, most of which operate with external funds.

Data from Hartford and Philadelphia support common sense that pregnant students who receive support and services do not have a high dropout rate. Not surprisingly, most districts also offer either in-school programs or separate programs for pregnant students, and some districts offer both. Baltimore has a comprehensive high school for expectant mothers that serves about 1,000 students between eleven and twenty. The school offers counseling; health screening; social services; daycare; and classes in prenatal care, family planning and parenting. New Orleans had a separate high school for pregnant students, but it closed two years ago because the students preferred to remain in

the regular school. The Pittsburgh Public Schools has an Educational Medical School program housed inside an alternative school, which allows pregnant teenagers both to attend regular school classes and to have classes on their own.[65] In Philadelphia, pregnant students can stay in the regular school or attend a special program that offers individualized instruction and health and social services.

The problems faced by students who are parents offer a great challenge to the resources of school districts. Because childcare for parenting teenagers appears to increase schools' holding power,[41] many districts are now trying to offer childcare services right on the school campus. Philadelphia has daycare and counseling, including counseling for teenage fathers. Milwaukee's program provides both transportation to school and daycare. Albuquerque has a comprehensive New Futures School program in a special school for pregnant and parenting teenagers. This program offers educational and support services for students, childcare for their children, and counseling for their families. An overwhelming number of New Futures students remain in school to graduate, and repeat pregnancy rates for New Futures clients are less than a third the national rate for teen pregnancies.

Parent involvement. Urban superintendents agree that parental involvement is crucial to holding students in school. Parents who support the educational progress of their children in the early years increase their chances of staying in school. Yet

developing ways to involve families has been difficult in multi-cultural multilingual schools. The increases in single parent households, women in the labor force, and teenage parents have even pressured schools to assume responsibilities once held by families. Unfortunately, the link between school and home is characteristically weak for potential dropouts,[66] many of whom do not even have a clear legal guardian. Often support staff--social workers, counselors and psychologists--must intervene to create this essential link to parents.

Nevertheless, almost all districts recommend that parental involvement at either the elementary or secondary school level be considered a dropout prevention strategy. Many schools have designed specific ways of reaching parents and involving them directly in keeping students in school; for example, electronic telephoning to parents of absent students, counselor contacts with parents after the student has been absent for five or so days, guidebooks explaining parent and school responsibilities, parenting classes, parent inservice training, home-school coordination programs, and home visits to students who leave school without requesting a transfer. Some urban educators believe that "empowering" parents by giving them real advocacy decision-making roles also increases the school's holding power.

Newark has reactivated the Chapter 1 parent advisory councils and has involved parents on local School Improvement Teams, which also include teachers and administrators. During the summer of 1985, these teams were given a three-day training session in problem solving techniques to enable them to return to

their schools and begin to solve their local problems more effectively.

Dallas' Chapter 1 program has a parent and community involvement component in which a parent ombudsperson evaluates the needs of parents and interprets them to school personnel; gives workshops to help parents become involved in the children's learning; and works with parents of at risk children to improve the students' attendance and to ensure that they have needed resources.

Community/business relations. Many urban superintendents are enthusiastic about joint school and business connections that draw at risk students directly into the world of work, while at the same time keep them in school until they earn their high school diplomas. These collaborations take various forms: compacts between schools and business; schools adopted by business; businesspeople who mentor students; scholarship funds; and business-school planning groups and round-tables.

The Boston Compact, one of the most successful and well-publicized business-school alliances, has created a number of kinds of school-business ties. They include jobs for students based on school attendance, a scholarship endowment for students who stay in school, and jobs guaranteed by industry if the schools increase holding power and performance.[67] However, these school-business ties have not yet lowered the general dropout rates.

Through the American Can Foundation and the National Crime

Prevention Council, the Baltimore City Public Schools has created a Security Education Employment Program in which students who are at least eighteen-years-old and do not have criminal records complete their high school academic requirements while participating in community service activities and training for security jobs. The program has been successful in creating a sense of community responsibility in its students and in placing most of its graduates in security positions.

Atlanta has created a successful adopt-a-school program in which a business comes into a school, works with the students, and guarantees them a job upon graduation. This program serves the lower 25 percent of the high school senior class. An "adoptor" from the business community meets with a student on a scheduled basis to help him or her prepare for the transition from high school to work, and to help secure for the student an entry-level job. Of the three hundred students served so far in the program, 93 percent have gotten jobs or have begun some postsecondary education.

As a result of commitments from the Federated Foundation, both Houston[68] and Atlanta have established successful alternative schools in Federated department stores. Although these schools take in students who have been involved with the juvenile justice system and have been suspended or expelled, students come by choice. The alternative student academies have small classes with support services on site, and store management personnel offer mentoring relationships.

The Chicago Public School System has created special

schools for at risk students inside industrial plants and other businesses. And Dade County is working with the Private Industry Council and South Florida Employment and Training Consortium to provide part-time jobs for students, full-time jobs upon their graduation, and remedial instruction and counseling when warranted.

In several cities, foundations and private benefactors have put money aside for high school graduates to go on to college. In Cleveland, a "Scholarship in Escrow" provides scholarships for three students chosen in the sixth grade. In most of these programs the donors or other adults connected to the programs mentor the chosen students.

Because of the stake of the community at large in urban schooling, businesses are increasingly taking a role beyond providing scholarships and job opportunities. With a grant from the Ford Foundation, the Detroit Public Schools has launched a "blue ribbon" committee composed of Detroit's leading citizens to design a comprehensive dropout plan for the district. And the Portland Leaders Roundtable Planning Project, comprised of business, civic, and educational elites, has developed a comprehensive plan for youth education, support services, and training and employment.[69] A number of districts have also created councils, coalitions, and interagency teams to ensure that school learning is more directed to the needs of local businesses, and that appropriate community resources are available to urban students.

Promotional campaigns to increase school holding power. Although no research exists on the effectiveness of media and other campaigns to encourage students to stay in school, several school systems have taken radio spots and created poster campaigns as a dropout prevention strategy. For example, the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University, South Carolina, sponsored by General Foods and McDonalds, is developing an ad campaign with such slogans as, "You're no fool, stay in school."

School districts are also being inventive in developing other promotional devices to increase school holding power. Dade County, for example, is asking each secondary school to identify one hundred potential droppouts and is then paying the schools $50 for each at risk student who is kept in school throughout the academic year. The Mayor of Miami is also writing every high school student a personal note saying how important it is to stay in school. In Chicago, an advertising agency is developing positive images of the Chicago public schools as part of a public campaign. The Philadelphia Public School System has taken it upon itself to fight the prevailing negative opinions of urban schools in the newspapers by developing advertising campaigns as well as asking the papers to reconsider their news coverage of the schools.

In 1986, the Detroit Public Schools engaged in a collaborative effort with one of the local public television stations to produce a one-hour documentary, "Sidewalk High," that communicated to the local community the difficulty schools were having keeping students in school.

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